

Human Kindness Foundation

A Little Good News

Spring 2015

RADICAL RESPONSIBILITY

A note from HKF Co-Director Catherine: Years ago, early in my time working for Human Kindness Foundation, I had a chronic condition that caused some days of intense pain. Bo sometimes visited me while I was at my worst, and sat with me through moments when I wished I could die to stop hurting. As a deeply compassionate person, he did what he could to help: quietly played his guitar, held my hand, or told me stories to distract me. Since this went on for years, I had many opportunities to talk with Bo about my experience. He told me that, if it were possible, he would make the pain stop, just take it away. But he also said, "That's why I'm not God." Because of our years-long friendship, I had no doubt that Bo cared and even suffered with me. He wasn't trying to get out of being sympathetic or supportive. He wasn't making light of my suffering. He was telling me there was a gift in the pain. If we've done all we can to relieve suffering, and the suffering is still there, then that pain holds an opportunity for spiritual growth. I was able to accept this from Bo because I knew he cared. His heart wanted to remove the suffering, and at the same time, he wanted me to use this opportunity to learn and grow. (That medical condition is much better now.)

I tell this story because this newsletter includes the very challenging topic of Radical Responsibility, and I hope you can feel that we send this message with the compassion that Bo described with "That's why I'm not God." If we could remove your suffering, we would. If we could change the circumstances of your unfairly harsh sentence, or how you are treated in prison, or the deep wounds of your childhood... we absolutely would. Sita and the rest of us at HKF know that your pain is deep. Our hearts hurt for what you have been through and how you continue to suffer. And with that sadness in our hearts, we hold our faith that your spiritual journey has meaning and purpose. We hold our faith that you CAN find a "Peace that passes understanding," whether you ever get out of prison or not. We hold our faith that God loves you.

So please read this newsletter knowing that we wish we could be beside you, holding your hand, playing your favorite song, and gently encouraging you to take this very difficult journey to Radical Responsibility.

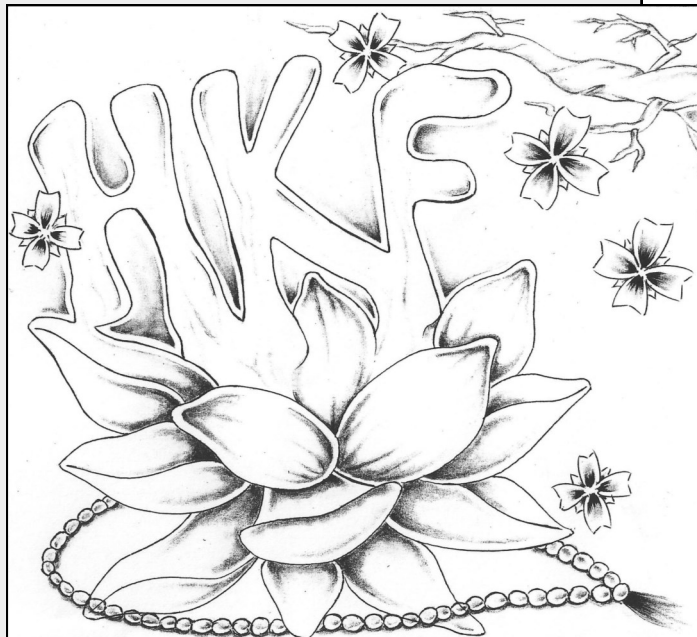
Love, Catherine

A note from Co-Director Sita: Fleet Maull served 14 years in federal prison after being convicted on drug charges. Since his release in 1999, he has continued his Buddhist practice and his service to others who are incarcerated. When I read the chapter about him in a book



called *Bearing Witness*, I was deeply moved by what Fleet had to say in this paragraph: **"The basic issue is accepting responsibility for the situation you're in—not guilt, but responsibility. Then you don't get involved in a lot of blaming.... The most effective strategy for me was to take complete responsibility for everything that had happened and for everything that I would continue to experience, even in situations with a clear and significant involvement of others."** I wondered what this might imply in my life and in the lives of our prison friends? I reached out to Fleet,

who by that time was already an old friend, and asked if he had thoughts he wanted to share with Human Kindness Foundation's readers. Fleet agreed to answer a letter which had come addressed to me, and you'll see the letter and Fleet's response below. Fleet encourages us all to be "radically responsible individuals who do not indulge in blame, resentment, justification or being right." I've seen how powerfully this practice has transformed Fleet Maull's life, and so have many others who are touched by his work through Prison Mindfulness Institute, located in Rhode Island. Following Fleet's letter, you can read letters from a young man who describes his own process of taking responsibility for his crime. These are not easy concepts to work with. Read this newsletter a few times. Sit with it, like you might sit with a long letter from a friend whose love for you is rock-solid. Does it contain, for you, a doorway to freedom? Love, Sita



Dear Sita,

My name is Jason. I'm serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole for 1st degree murder. Bo's books and ideas and teachings are universal and really have spoken to me.

Sita, I'm going through a rough time right now. I'm innocent of the crime I was convicted of. Don't get me wrong, I did kill someone, but it was a tragic mistake and not a malicious act. I have never been locked up in my life. I've been married for 10 years and am the father of 2 beautiful little girls ages 7 and 5. I've never used drugs and seldom ever drunk alcohol. I worked in skilled labor jobs, and I owned my own home at 29 years old—I'm 30 now. I was a musician playing bass in bands in my area.

The reason I tell you this is because I lived a good life and stayed away from drugs, crime, etc. Yet the events of that night replay in my mind every day like a broken record that can't be turned off.

I was performing at a private party. When I tried to leave, I got into a verbal argument with someone I didn't know.

When I went to apologize, I got hit with a beer bottle. I re-

strained the person—a female. She told her friends I attacked her for no reason, and 10 of them surrounded me around my van and threatened to kill me. I panicked and told them I had a gun and would shoot if they didn't stop attacking me. They didn't. My gun was registered to me, and I had a permit for it. I tried to draw my gun to scare them off with a warning shot. As the gun came out, one of the 10 rushed me and slammed me against my van causing the gun to go off. It shot her in the head, killing her. Needless to say, my life hasn't been the same ever since. I've lost everything I ever worked for and may never get it back. How do you explain to a 7 and 5 year old that daddy is never coming home? I've tried taking my own life several times because I can't bear the pain that haunts me. Sita, I took someone's life! Whether by accident or whatever, it all boils down to that fact. Since the beginning I've had my faith and believed God would see me through. Yet I often ask myself "why so much pain?" I'm not sure exactly what I hope to accomplish writing to you. I know you have no miracle cure or magic pill to swallow, but maybe just having one more piece of advice can make all the difference. Thank you for what you and the Human Kindness

A note about legal concerns: Please understand that we are discussing spiritual responsibility, not legal. At HKF, we have NO legal expertise, and NO legal advice to give. It makes sense to us, based on stories we've heard from the many thousands of convicts who write to us, to be cautious regarding legal implications. If you have charges pending, or appeals that aren't finished, anything you say or write could possibly be used against you. However, no matter who you are or what your situation, you can privately practice Radical Responsibility.

Foundation do. May God continue to bless you.
Sincerely, Jason

Dear Jason,

My name is Fleet Maull. I have been friends with Sita and Bo for many years. I served 14 years myself on a drug conviction. I'm very saddened to hear of your extremely difficult situation, I can hardly imagine. I'd like to share with you an approach to working with life challenges, especially the really daunting ones, that has been extremely helpful and transformative for me and many others. I call this approach Radical Responsibility.

What Radical Responsibility means is to make the choice to be 100% responsible for what we create in our life, the impact we have on others, the consequences our actions produce for ourselves, as well as what just shows up in our life. It is not a question of blaming ourselves versus blaming someone else — it is just a question of owning EVERYTHING that happens in our lives.

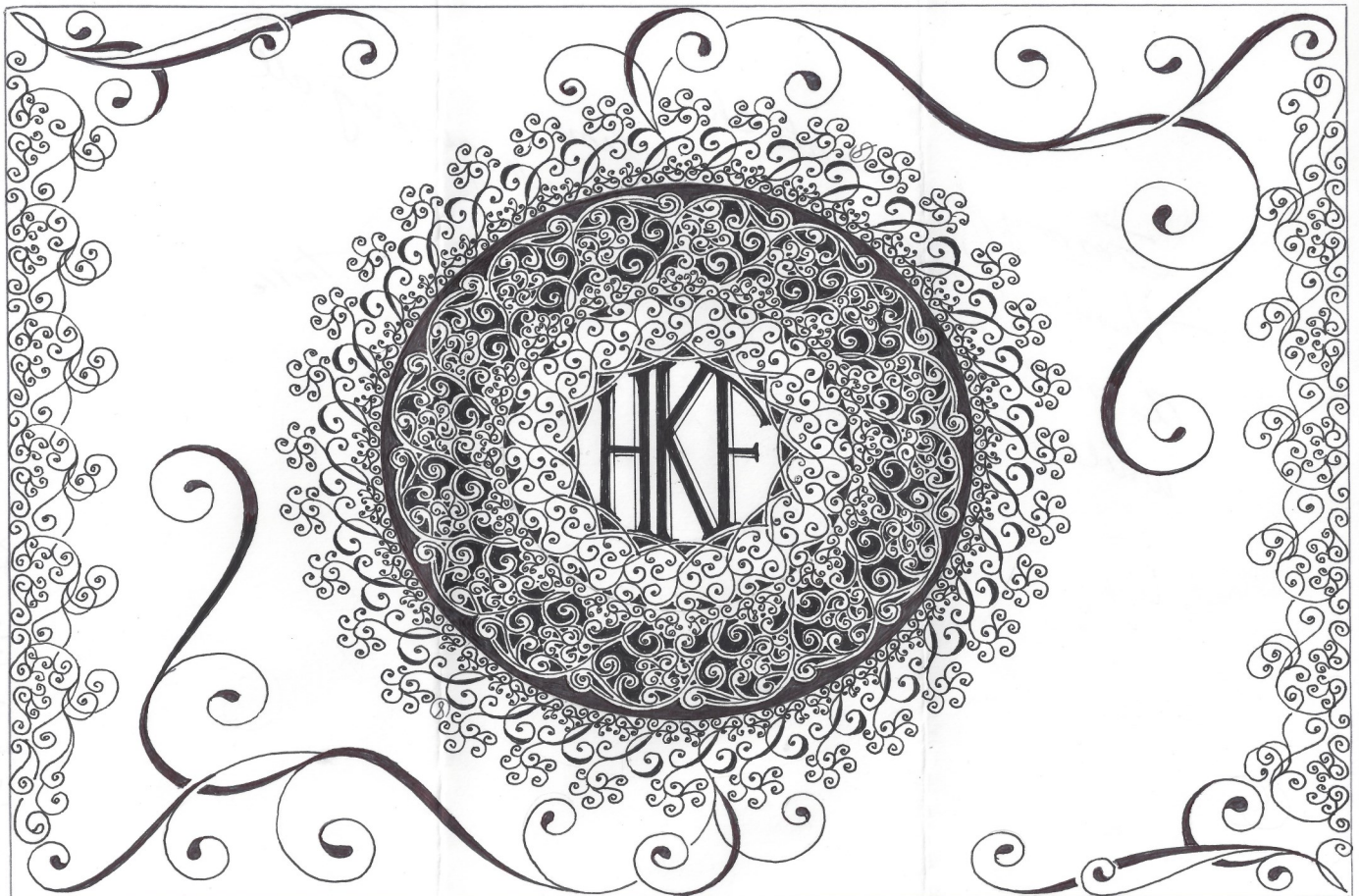
My conviction was exaggerated, like yours. I was guilty of selling drugs but not of being a "kingpin," which is what I was convicted of. My Buddhist practice led me to accept that I was responsible for all of it, even the exaggerated part, even the kingpin sentence when I wasn't a kingpin. I realize this sounds very radical. That's why it is called Radical Responsibility, and I believe it is the only doorway to true freedom.

Anytime we're attributing the cause of our happiness or unhappiness to something outside of ourselves, we are essentially giving away our power. In your situation, you may dig down and feel you can take some responsibility for this situation. For being there that evening, for interacting the way you interacted, for making the decision at some point in your life to have a gun, registered or not, and so on, and you may decide to accept 20, 30, even 40% responsibility or ownership, but say to yourself "I just don't see how I can accept the other 60, 70 or 80%, really it just happened, it was caused by this woman and these people." While many people might agree with you, this doesn't help you. To the extent that you see the cause of your situation as being outside of yourself, you are giving your power away and you are focusing your energy where you have no ability to create change.

The idea of Radical Responsibility is focusing all our energy where we can do something about our situation, where we actually have some real power, and that is with ourselves. We all know it's not easy to change ourselves, it is often not easy to even manage ourselves and our own behavior. But at least we have some influence—some power—with ourselves. With others, we have no power. At all. We cannot control others, and we can't control life. What we can work on is ourselves.

I'm sure this message is not providing any particular type of solace for you. I regret that because I would really like to

Artist Stephen Land drew this mandala with joy and thanksgiving, as a spiritual practice and as a gift to all of us.



offer some solace to you and to anyone in your situation. What I can say, is that the approach of Radical Responsibility can open you up to an incredible journey of self transformation. People have different theories about karma and such ideas, but it's really not important to figure that out. What is important is to accept the fact that it happened, just or unjust, it happened and it didn't happen to someone else, it happened to you. The only real question at this point, for you and your life, is what are you going to do with this?

What happened to you is terrible and unfair and could have happened to anybody who has a gun. The problem is, making yourself the victim leaves you with all the feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, outrage, fear, overwhelmed and all those kinds of feelings that have lead you to want to take your own life.

What if you took full responsibility for what happened without getting into the details? As you shift into that perspective, you may experience different feelings. Rather than the very strong emotions that come from the victim mindset, you may experience clarity, understanding, perhaps empathy or compassion even. You also may experience challenging feelings of regret, embarrassment. Yet, overall the feelings have a more positive, more uplifting and more empowering quality to them.

What you get there is a clear picture of two very different worlds; one, the victim version, and the other, the responsible, accountable or radically responsible version.

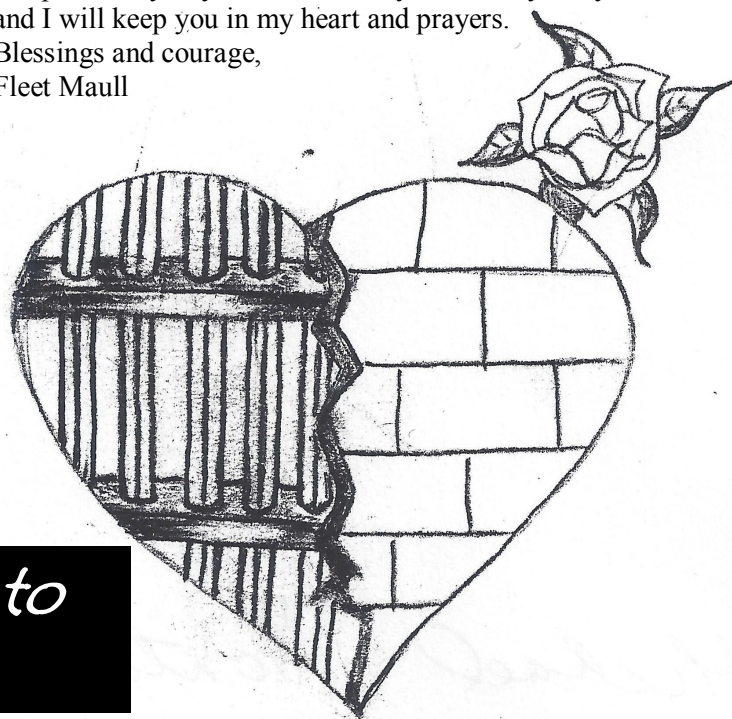
We can't change circumstances, they have already happened, but we do have choice and power as to how we react to those circumstances. This is not easy. Taking Radical Responsibility is the most challenging, most evolutionary, transformative act a human being can do.

Jason, you've found yourself in a situation where you are truly up against the wall. And you will either stay trapped in your victim version about what has happened to you, which is very compelling, or in your own enlightened self interest, you can choose Radical Responsibility. You can say "This happened to me. I don't know why, even if I do understand elements that I contributed to it. I'm going to choose to focus my energy on what I can own in it, in fact, I'm just going to own the whole thing, and I'm going to let it become the driver for my personal transformation. I'm not going to focus any energy on blaming anyone else, I'm just going to let Radical Responsibility and this extremely difficult and challenging situation drive a powerful process of personal transformation in me."

That is the opportunity you have here, Jason. I hope this idea, as radical as it may sound and as difficult as it may be to take in, will provide you a doorway into a new place of freedom and possibility in your life. I wish you the very, very best, and I will keep you in my heart and prayers.

Blessings and courage,

Fleet Maull



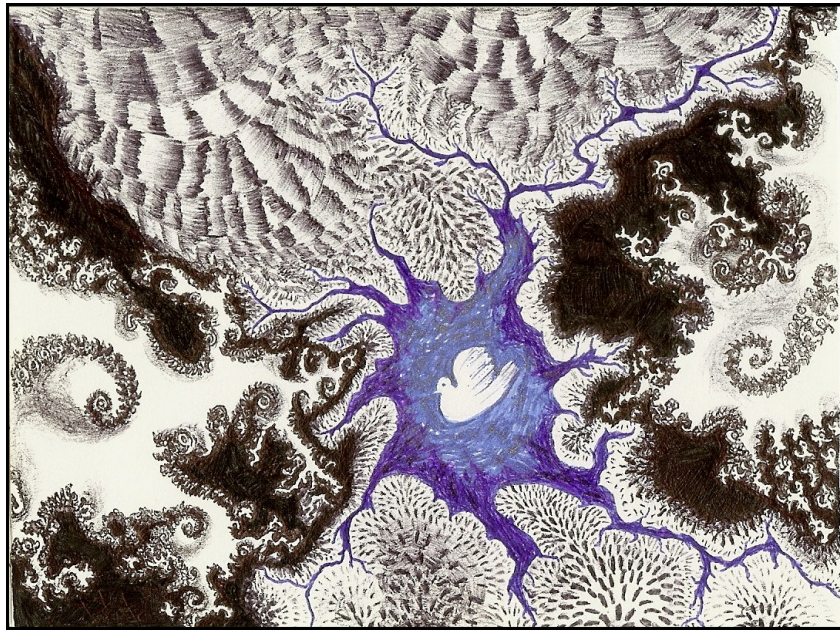
A young man's journey to Radical Responsibility

I saw my entire predicament....
My mind and soul became completely at peace.

Dear Human Kindness Foundation, I want to thank you from the depths of my being for all that your materials have done for me. I've written you twice prior to this, the first was to request a copy of *We're All Doing Time* and the second to ask for help in my situation. I'm writing you today to let you know that *We're All Doing Time* has helped me more than I can truly explain, but yet still, I will try. I'm a 23 year old man and I'm currently charged with Felony 1 murder. I've been in the county jail since early June and was fighting myself tooth and nail over what to do about my charge. In all reality, I had

my case beat—there is no physical evidence and only a basic and, in my opinion, quite weak circumstantial case against me. When I got your two books, I read them and engaged in a very broken and weak series of attempts to follow the meditation and pranayama exercises. Recently, however, I had the most amazing breakthrough when I started doing close to 2 hours of meditation practice each morning after our 4 a.m. breakfast. I saw my entire predicament, the motions, the actors, the circumstances, the massive substance abuse, and all of the things that played into me taking the life of an inno-

cent woman. Immediately, I wrote a request form to speak to the lead detective on my case. Through meditating on compassion, love, and your story "Lineage," my mind and soul became completely at peace with the fact that the RIGHT THING TO DO, in fact THE ONLY THING TO DO, was to confess and to ask for no special deal or treatment. By doing this, I saved the family potential grief over the time period it would've taken for any-



thing to go to trial, saved the investigators and county time and money that can now be spent serving this community, and I saved myself from a life that would have been spent in slavery to drugs, addiction, self-hatred, anger, depression and loneliness. Thank you so much for the work you do and know that you have left a permanent mark on my life and in my heart. I hope now to happily accept whatever prison time is given to me and spend my time rehabilitating myself and becoming a prison monk. Hopefully, I can help make a change in someone else's life while serving my time and while trekking this path of the great mystery. I wish you all the love, joy, happiness and prosperity imaginable and hope that I will one day be released and be able to come see the organization and volunteer or at least find somewhere I belong in the path of service. Again, thank you. I love you more than I can express. N.K.

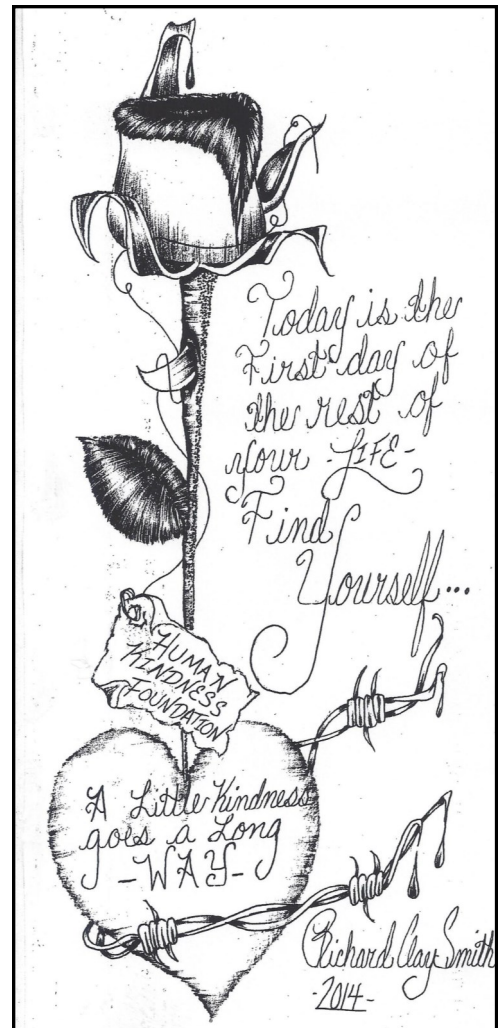
Dear Sita,

Thank you so much for the copy of *Just Another Spiritual Book* and the heartfelt note you sent with it. I intend to stay in touch. It seems to me that not only receiving and reading materials, but also writing back seems within itself a kind

of spiritual practice. I'm the only person at my jail that does any sort of meditation or spiritual practice so even though in my heart I know that I'm not alone and that countless beings, past, present and future are sitting right here with me, I guess HKF helps give me a tangible and present connection to the spiritual community, and I'm very thankful for that. I've had some slip-ups since my initial dedication, but I find that the more I meditate and the more I study my materials that my mind and my heart sort of "ping" every time I speak or act with love, kindness, compassion and/or understanding. It's a beautiful experience that has constantly reminded me of my higher nature and of my potential for spiritual growth and ability to impact others and the world around me. I don't mean to make everything sound amazing, beautiful and perfect even though in the deepest part of my heart, I know that it is. So I'll be honest and say that I've been deeply struggling with anxiety and uncertainty about going to prison. I have never been to prison before and now that I've confessed, I'm irrevocably dedicated to this course of action for the next unknown number of years. I am 23, and it's just now dawned on me that I may not get out of prison while I'm still young enough to start a

family, and even when I am released, my parole might make it difficult if not impossible to follow my other plans for my life which was to come and volunteer with HKF or find a monastery to take vows and live in. Wow! This is exactly what I meant when I said writing back seems to be a form of meditation and spiritual practice: I see that I'm attached to my plans, and such an attachment is causing me stress and anxiety over the potential of losing some-

thing that I don't even have. Such a simple understanding and already my discomfort is replaced by a blissful sense of awe and yet another baby step in my journey. It's funny how now I



A note from HKF: each person's journey is different. HKF does **not** make any recommendation about whether to confess or about any legal issue.



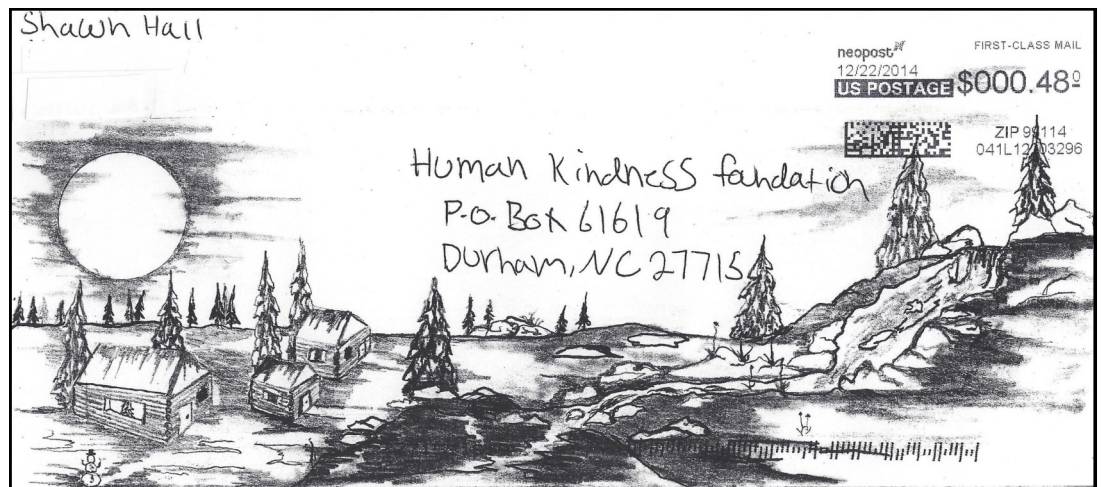
have nothing to really talk about except for my positive plans for the future and even funnier that soon enough my mind will be assaulted and troubled by yet another transitory event, phenomenon, feeling or attachment. Either way, I'll continue. I hope that when I go to prison I will be able to find like-minded spiritual seekers and if not, at least have the patience and dedication to continue my inner journey. I have no doubt of a few simple things. 1) I will continue to send my love and prayers to your organization and all that put their hearts and love into your work. 2) I will fail and falter many times because my toughest trials are still ahead of me, but more importantly 3) My spiritual journey will continue until I reach the source, whether it's in this lifetime or a thousand lifetimes from now. Again I'd like to thank you so much for your materials and your love,
Your Friend, N.K.

Dear Human Kindness Foundation,
Hi again. I feel like a soldier bringing news from the front haha! Well anyways, I wanted to wish you guys a Merry Christmas and to tell you about mine. My Christmas day start-

ed out amazingly with about an hour of meditation and afterwards finishing a good book. I had already made up my mind that my Christmas gift to my 8 man tank would be coffee and kindness. The results were amazing. At lunch, the kitchen director had arranged for everyone in the jail to have a huge meal and right after they delivered the food I was asked by my tank to lead us in a grace prayer—this is the first time this has ever happened in this tank!!! So I prayed for the strength and blessings of peace and happiness for us, our families and our community. Shortly after that, people began approaching me and asking me questions about life and God and suffering and it felt like I was led to speak every word I spoke. By the end of the conversations, people were thanking me and praying and one guy even suggested that I become a preacher because of how I represented God. I told him it was my goal to become a prison monk and use my spiritual walk to help others as much as I can. His reply floored me... he said, "you already are, bro." I want to thank you guys so much for the work you do and for sending your materials out and I want to let you guys know that yours and Bo's love still shines through your materials and from the people you touch. I'm still a long way away from home but with each passing moment, my heart draws me closer to the One. Blessings of love and light, N.K.

Sita, Catherine, and all of you at the Human Kindness Foundation,
I want to thank you from the very core of my being for your love, support, and

teachings. On the 12th of this month, I was sentenced to 50 years in prison. So far, I've been able to feel nothing but blessed to be given this heavy illusion of time and intense trials. I'm sure that in the not-so-distant future I will go through times of great sadness, loss, fear, anger and all the natural attitudes of life, but the beautiful thing I have come to realize is: how is that any different than if I were out in the world? The amazing surprise: I would have days of sadness, loss, fear and anger wherever I was! That realization has inspired peace and confidence in my mind and heart. The more I learn to open up, love, and just Be, the easier it gets for me to see God and God's love in everyone, everything, and every situation that enters into my life, and to be more grateful, compassionate, and most importantly—LOVING! Bo's books and my work with them has inspired me to seek deeper and deeper into the beautiful and wondrous nature of this life I've been given, even the seemingly "bad" parts of it. I find myself smiling and enjoying myself more than I have in a long time. I'm looking forward to all the things that lie ahead of me in my spiritual development and my walk through life. Thank you for sending the articles on "Tonglen" and "Radical Responsibility." I will enjoy trying these practices out and using them to move forward to a deeper and simpler me. I love you guys with all my heart and look forward to writing you more as I move forward in my own journey. With a smile on my face and peace in my heart, I sign off. —N.K.





“Sitting here doing 3 years for possessing 2 grams of narcotics, I get angry. I act out sometimes. When the confusion clears. When I stop telling myself “F. U.” When I remember “Breathe”... “Be Quiet.” When I see the shackle turn into a bird and fly. I thank Bo and Sita, Catherine, Gabe, Buddha, Gandhi, for reminding me I’m not an item, a test experiment. I’m loved. I’m responsible for me. I can help others. I’m FREE/HERE/NOW on the inside. I’m part of the outside.”

—Jeffrey, Alaska



Many thanks to the artists: Pg 1: Roger Tad Price, Tucker, AR*; Pg 2: David Maynard-Moody, Hutchinson, KS; Pg 3: Stephen Land, Angleton, TX; Pg 4: Michael Montano, Kennewick, WA; Pg 5 upper: Stephen Stoeltje, Beaumont, TX; Pg 5 lower: Richard Clay Smith, Staunton, VA; Pg 6 upper: anonymous; Pg 6 lower: Shawn Hall, Colville, WA; Pg 7 upper: Kevin Cotton, Shreveport, LA; Pg 7 lower: Rob Becker, Danville, IL; Pg 8: Dominique Aguilar, Wasco, CA.

The drawing on page 1 is done on 5 envelopes that fit together so well, you may not be able to tell they are separate drawings. If you have access to the internet, you can see the drawing in full color on the Human Kindness Foundation Facebook page.

Human Kindness Foundation
PO Box 61619
Durham, NC 27715
www.humankindness.org

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Durham, NC
Permit No. 205

SPONSOR OF THE PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT



*If you always assume
the man sitting next to you
is the Messiah
waiting for some simple human kindness—
You will soon come to weigh your words
and watch your hands.
And if the Messiah so chooses
Not to reveal himself
In your time—
It will not matter.*